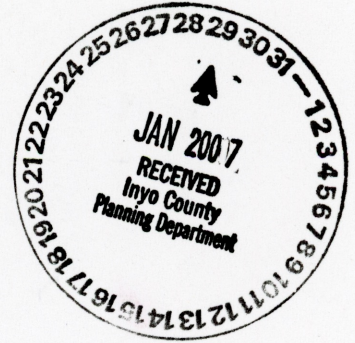


January 27, 2007

Nancy Masters
P.O. Box 478
Independence, CA 93526

Inyo County Planning Department
P.O. Drawer L
Independence, CA 93526



Re: Old Big Pine Library Draft Negative Declaration

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Please accept these comments on the Draft Negative Declaration for the Demolition/Sale of the Big Pine Library. Incorporated into my comments is a brief history of the Library that incorporates information from a variety of sources, including Inyo County Official Records, Board of Supervisor's Minutes, local newspapers, and Inyo County Free Library's archives. This document is attached.

The assertion that the Big Pine Library is not historically significant is not a matter of fact, but of opinion. Wide knowledge of Inyo County history, and an understanding of the pioneering nature of early Inyo residents is necessary to determine the significance of sites and structures in the Eastern Sierra. Inyo County's architectural heritage is not one of grandiose buildings or monumental structures. The built environment reflects the struggles that have characterized Inyo's history: the struggle of Native Americans first to resist, and then to adapt to the intrusion of outsiders, the struggle of the ranchers, farmers, miners, and merchants to eke out a living in a beautiful but unforgiving country, the struggle to moderate the hard physical realities with culture and education, and the continuing struggle with the City of Los Angeles over water and land.

The remaining buildings of the architectural past reflect the difficult and isolated conditions people dealt with. Local sawmills were the source for much of the milled wood. Designs were often simple. Single-wall construction was common, where rough sawn one by twelve boards acted as the frame and the outer wall, with a lining of newspaper, muslin, sizing and wallpaper on the inside for decoration. Rocks at the four corners served as a foundation. Adobe was also used, but few structures survived the earthquake. With the advent of the train, building supplies were more easily obtained, and buildings became more elaborate. After several disastrous fires, concrete became the product of choice, as in the Inyo County Courthouse and other public structures. The Big Pine Library, with its construction date of 1922-23, was solid and comfortable for its time. It had modern architecture, indoor plumbing (two toilets!), electricity, and was wood frame. Inside, the wood trim was dark and varnished in the modern fashion. Seen through this lens, the Big Pine Library was a fine building on Big Pine's Main Street. Its construction and style help us to understand the very real difficulties Owens Valley

citizens faced. Without such reminders, we no longer have the visible and visceral comprehension of the past.

On page three of the "Historical Status of the Big Pine Library", staff diminish the role played by the building by stating "Available information simply identifies the building as having a past use as an American Legion hall and town library." These roles were (and are) critical to Inyo County's cultural landscape. The impact of the Great War led to an outpouring of public support for veterans, reflected in public monies for construction of memorial halls. It is hard to understand the feelings of those times, confronted as we are with daily world conflict, but the public felt a great duty toward those that had served in the War to End All Wars, and these memorial halls are a visible reminder of that gratitude.

The travails of establishing library service in remote and desolate Inyo County are well documented in Anne Margrave's "Inyo County Free Library History, July 1913-January 1932". Miss Margrave recounts the indefatigable efforts of the first librarians and custodians to bring books to remote mining camps and the main towns. Money and housing ^{were} always a concern, so the opportunity to occupy the Big Pine Legion Hall was fortuitous and proved successful, as 76 years of occupancy showed. The struggle with the City of Los Angeles impacted even the Library service, as this quote from Miss Margrave indicates;

"The opening of the County Library was almost co-incident with opening of the Los Angeles Aqueduct – an omen, perhaps, for the history of the Library, as of all civic undertakings in Inyo County, has been greatly conditioned by the activities of the City of Los Angeles in providing itself with a water supply."

Miss Margrave goes on to link the failure of the County to undertake new Library buildings to the "long-drawn-out quarrel" with the City. This impact of the famous Water War no doubt extended to many county projects (and still does), and is reflected in the Big Pine Library's need to occupy a previously built structure. It is therefore "associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of California's history."

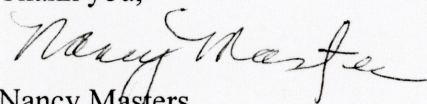
Further, Norman Clyde, widely known Sierra mountaineer, frequented the Big Pine Library, making use of its reading material, and therefore the building is associated with "persons important in our past". Additionally, Jim and Belle Butler, of Tonopah fame, owned the land upon which the building stands.

The State Office of Historic Preservation lists the Big Pine Library, along with all the other surveyed properties in Inyo County, in the California Historical Resources Information System. The State indicates that the properties in the survey need to be reevaluated, no doubt because the Survey is twenty-six years old. It does not mean that the Library building, along with all of the other surveyed properties, is not historic. In fact, the properties were included on the survey because of their historic nature. Any evaluation should be performed by a historian familiar with Inyo history.

Does this document comply with the goals stated in the Inyo County General Plan, and Inyo 20-20? Both documents emphasize the preservation of Inyo's historic values.

In conclusion, please reevaluate the finding of "not historically significant" in light of a deep knowledge of Inyo County history and an understanding that few structures in the Eastern Sierra ^{are} architecturally distinguished on its own. Each building sheds some light on the inhabitants of Inyo and how they accorded themselves to this country.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Nancy Masters". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Nancy Masters

HISTORY OF THE BIG PINE LIBRARY BUILDING

201 North Main Street

Big Pine, CA 93513

Setting

The Big Pine Library building is located on Highway 395 or Main Street, in the community of Big Pine, California. Big Pine began to form in the period of 1864-1869 when ranchers settled in the area, and by 1912 was a well-established community, with ten fraternal and social organizations, two schools, two churches, and numerous agricultural and mining operations¹. Many of the historic structures that used to be a part of Big Pine Main Street views are now gone, some demolished within the last few years, including a stone garage adjacent to Big Pine Creek on the west, and a barn on the east side of North Main St. A few notable public and commercial buildings remain to remind the visitors and residents of past streetscapes; the Big Pine School, built by distinguished California architect W.H. Weeks, Big Pine General Store (now Carroll's Market), and the Big Pine Library.

Architecture and Construction

The design of the Big Pine library falls within the Craftsman genre. It was built to be functional, yet it reflects the design elements of the time during which it was constructed, 1922-23. It is single-story, with a simple gable roof. Consistent with design principles of the Craftsman era, rafters are exposed, and the gable end has brackets that are made to appear to support the roof. It sits on a perimeter concrete foundation, the latest in construction materials for the Twenties. Construction is wood-frame, with bevel or shiplap siding milled to look like multiple small boards. There is a water table or drip cap above the foundation which contributes to the horizontal emphasis, typical of Craftsman design principles. Double-hung wood windows are placed in twos, and are classic examples of Craftsman windows with multiple panes. Many buildings of this age no longer have the original windows in place. No storm windows are present, although historically appropriate wooden storm windows would increase energy efficiency. One window set was removed without County permission by the Girl Scout troop, but the original windows are in storage in Independence, and can be reinstalled.² The interior wall finish is wallboard with lath covering the joints, a common practice in the early twentieth century before the advent of wallboard compound, and when the alternative was expensive lath and plaster.

Additional features include a fireplace and chimney, a broad concrete front porch, original pushbutton light switches, original toilets and sink (one toilet is in storage at Independence Maintenance garage)³, a kitchen, original finish woodwork, and partial restoration in 1994. The size of the structure is 50 feet by 58 feet.

¹ *Inyo Anno Domini 1912*, published by the Inyo Register

² Personal knowledge, N. Masters

³ Personal knowledge, N. Masters

There is some evidence that the Big Pine Library was built from lumber from the old Big Pine School building. Further analysis of the structural elements by a historic preservation specialist is necessary to determine source of lumber and restoration requirements.

History

American Legion

The Great War, known now as World War I, involved American troops from 1917 –1919. The first major world conflict involving millions of American soldiers profoundly affected the nation and its attitude toward veterans. The veterans themselves became agents of change as they formed effective organizations to lobby for the needs of returned soldiers. One of these organizations was the American Legion, which began in 1919 and continues to this day. Government at all levels responded to veterans' needs with legislation designed to assist veterans, from issues of compensation to care for disabled vets. In California, the State Legislature enacted Political Code section 4041 in 1921 that permitted counties and cities to assist in erecting Memorial Halls for veterans. This code was later repealed, with the sections moved to the Military and Veterans Code (§1120-1262 for counties and Government Code § 37461 for cities).

Inyo County's veterans of the Great War had formed American Legion Posts shortly after the end of the war. In January and February of 1922, the Big Pine Legion was holding monthly meetings in Hall's Hall, and hosting dances.⁴ The January 21, 1922 *Big Pine Citizen* reported that,

“From the tone of the following article taken from the Inyo Independent, it appears the members of Mt. Whitney American Legion Post are going to put up a building of their own and a good one while they are at it. This is the spirit we like to see the boys showing; and we hope our Big Pine boys will step right out and map a campaign for raising funds for a building for the Big Pine Legion members.”

The article goes on to say that members of Big Pine would donate land and money for such a venture. The Mt. Whitney Post in Independence became aware of the State legislation providing for public funds for construction of Memorial Halls, and lobbied the Board of Supervisors for a tax of three mills on the dollar for that purpose. On June 5, 1922 the special tax was approved by the Supervisors on a four to one vote. Ten days later the *Big Pine Citizen* had a headline reading, “American Legion Boys to Build \$5,000 Club Hall”, and informing the readers that a lot was purchased from Jim Butler with a 70 foot frontage on Main Street. (This same Jim Butler was also the founder of Tonopah, Nevada, discovering some of the richest silver mines in the area with his wife Belle Butler. James L. Butler died on January 22, 1923, and his estate was worth \$120,812.26 at the time of the final distribution on May 24, 1923.)⁵ In fact, the

⁴ *Big Pine Citizen*, published Big Pine, CA. Microfilm at Bishop Branch Library.

⁵ Inyo County Official Records 39/588

legal description of the lot clearly indicated that it was 50 feet by 60 feet, although an additional 31 feet at the rear of the lot were transferred from the City of Los Angeles to the County of Inyo in 1940, rendering the lot 50 feet by 90.98 feet.⁶

In August of 1922 construction was still being contemplated, although enough funding had been secured to construct the building. An article in the *Big Pine Citizen* entitled "Opportunity to Help Big Pine Legion Boys" said that, "The intention of the boys is to put up a building that will be a credit to the town as well as to their members, and when their plans are complete they hope to have one of the nicest buildings in the county." The reporter went on to suggest that the old Big Pine grammar school building be donated to the "local legion boys" for their use of the material. In September 1922 the *Citizen* reported that,

"Big Pine Branch of the American Legion have donated the big bell formerly used in the old school building, to the Chamber of Commerce, and the Chamber has appointed a committee to erect a scaffold for it and it will be hung near the fire house on Main street and used as a fire bell."

Although there is no other mention of the use of the grammar school, it is clear that the Legion took possession of at least some of the materials from the school building. Further study is needed to determine if some of the lumber in the Big Pine Library has been previously used.

October 1922 still finds the "boys" in the construction phase, as an article on the death of George Hall in the *Citizen* explains that the Legion boys "were sawing some lumber for use in the Legion building" when Mr. Hall, who owned the mill, was found dead. It was not until February 6, 1923 that the County gave Notice of Intention to purchase the Hall from the Big Pine Branch of Inyo Post No. 118, American Legion for the sum of \$5,000. This purchase was consummated on April 2, 1923 after Mr. Carl Beckman appeared before the Board "and presented receipts showing the cost of this Building to be \$6,482.68 over and above the cost of the lot which was \$1,500.00, making a total cost of \$7,982.68."⁷ The motion to purchase passed on a vote of three to two. The deed from the Big Pine Branch of Inyo Post No. 118, American Legion, to the County of Inyo recorded April 3, 1923.⁸ Later the Board waived the tax assessment against the American Legion for the year 1923-24. Finally, on April 15, 1923, the new American Legion club house was dedicated.

On December 1, 1923 a letter was sent to the Board of Supervisors by the Big Pine American Legion and is transcribed as follows;

Big Pine, California
December 1, 1923

To the Honorable Board of Supervisors,
Independence, California

⁶ Inyo County Official Records 48/403

⁷ Inyo County Supervisors Minutes, Book H

⁸ Inyo County Official Records 38/234

Gentlemen:

There has (sic) been complaints made to the Executive Committee of the American Legion at Big Pine, in regard to the limited use for which we are putting the Memorial Hall in Big Pine. It has been our understanding that this building cannot be used for any other purpose that (sic) the use of Ex-service men and women and the different organizations composed of same.

We have been conducting the use of this building with the understanding that while it was built with the Tax-payers money, we understand that it was built for the special use of Ex-service men and women as a Memorial building to them, from the County of Inyo; in the same sense that the county Hospital was built and is maintained with the Tax-payers money for the use of disabled and indigent people of the County of Inyo.

We would respectfully request that the Honorable Board of Supervisors would appoint a board of three trustees for the Big Pine Memorial Building, and that you issue specific instructions as to what use the said trustees can make of the building.

Very respectfully yours,
Executive Committee
Big Pine Branch, American Legion.
By Earl S. Terry

The Board referred the letter to the District Attorney, and appointed D.L. Shaw, Earl S. Terry and Douglas Joseph to be custodians of the Building for the County. The Board further approved an expenditure of \$43.48 to paint the building, construct the concrete porch, and finish the fireplace. The District Attorney's response on December 19, 1923 merely stated Political Code 4041f, "Any County may provide and maintain (1) a home or homes for veteran soldiers, sailors and marine who have served the United States honorably in any of its wars; (2) buildings, memorial halls, or meeting places for the use of patriotic, fraternal and benevolent associations of such persons." The subdivisions of the section were also laid out, but no opinion was put forward.

At some point between the years 1923 and 1929 the Big Pine Post of the American Legion no longer found the use of its building necessary. Additional research needs to be completed to ascertain the reason for this, as the Big Pine Post is still extant.⁹ In 1930 the Inyo County Free Library Big Pine Branch made its home there, which continued uninterrupted for 76 years, until March 2006 and consolidation with the Big Pine School library at the school site.

Inyo County Free Library

During the early years of the Big Pine Branch, which was established on November 29, 1913, it occupied small quarters on Main Street across from the Legion Hall. The "Custodians" as the branch librarians were called, were Dottie Robinson (1913-1916), and Bessa Robinson (1916- at least 1946), who also lived in the Library with her husband. On March 12, 1928, Miss Bessa Robinson, Branch Custodian, wrote

⁹ Joseph Andrews, Mt. Whitney Post member, direct communication

imploringly to Miss Anne Margrave, County Librarian, "Is there any chance of the library having a new building soon? I do hope so, because this place is "most awfully" cluttered now, and I don't see that we can remedy the condition."¹⁰ During fiscal year 1929-30, the Big Pine Branch was able to take over the old Legion Hall, as reported by Miss Margrave in her annual report to the Board of Supervisors,

"Big Pine Branch is enjoying the change to more commodious quarters in the American Legion Building. Added shelves and a new book truck enables the custodian to use the added space without extra effort, although cleaning takes more time. The rooms are cooler and quieter, and allow much pleasanter use of the reading room, while the smaller children are separated from the older patrons."

An alarm was raised in a letter to Miss Margrave by Bessa Robinson (now Brooke) in 1946 that the American Legion wanted the building back, and she ended the letter with, "I wonder where they think the library could be housed now?" It must have been a false alarm, as the library continued to serve Big Pine's reading public in the library until this year.

Several organizations have shared the building with the Library, including the Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts, Inyo County Sheriff and the Big Pine Women's Club. In 1991, the Big Pine Women's Club gave back the space they were borrowing to the Library, and the Sheriff's office moved into new rooms across the street, spurring a renovation effort that resulted in a charming and cozy library.

In October 1991, under the leadership of Wanita Hunter, Branch Librarian, and Donna Manship, an active and supportive Friends of the Library group evolved. In 1994, the Friends, with the help of the Owens Valley Conservation Corps, enlarged openings to increase access to the collection. Volunteers scraped paint and refinished furniture, and in November 1994 held an Open House to celebrate the renovation. The *Inyo Register* wrote, "Friends of the Big Pine Branch of Inyo County Free Library held an open house to show off the remodeling and interior decorating of the historic library building. The program included a dedication of the Ruth Stilwell Reading Room in honor of her 16 years of volunteer service."¹¹

Library patrons of note that frequented the Big Pine Library include the amazing mountaineer, Norman Clyde, and Enid Larson, a noted biologist. Several circulation cards with Norman Clyde's signature on them are extant. The date stamp is in red ink, which has been the Big Pine Branch color for years. Norman Clyde, who was famed for the weight of his packs, carried many books into the back country, and was known for his reading in original languages. He was a scholar before becoming an eccentric mountaineer, and served a brief interlude as the Principal at Owens Valley High School in Independence, until his unorthodox disciplinary method of shooting over the heads of

¹⁰ Inyo County Library archives

¹¹ *Inyo Register*, Nov. 23, 1994

Halloween rabble-rousing students led to his dismissal by a disgruntled school board.¹² Partly because of his reading habit in the back country, he was known as the “pack that walks like a man”. He lived in Big Pine, on Baker Creek, and died on December 23, 1972. Enid Larsen lived in one of the historic homes in Big Pine and was recognized for her work on Merriam’s chipmunk, among other species. She was also an author, and several of her books are in the Inyo County Free Library collection.

Four years after the Big Pine Library was lauded as historic and charming by the press and the public, a new group of people became involved in the Friends of the Library, and declared it unsuitable and termite ridden. The Library is on county-owned land that is adjacent to the Big Pine Fire Department, which expressed a desire to acquire the land from the County and tear down the building. Furthering that goal, the Big Pine Library Advisory Committee organized and pursued alternate sites for the library, ranging from abandoned buildings to vacant lots. Librarians and patrons were adamantly opposed to moving out of the historic library, and the town was sorely divided. An arrangement was made with the Big Pine Unified School District whereby the District would call a bond election that would cover the cost of a modular joint-use library and modular classrooms. Rumors circulated that if the bond did not pass, the town would not have a library. The school district hired bond consultants that recruited votes, and the measure passed by very few votes. In March of 2006, the books were moved from the Big Pine Library to the new modular building south of the high school.

During its almost 80 years of public service, the Big Pine Library provided a haven for Big Pine’s readers and researchers, its schoolchildren, and community organizations. In the not-too-distant past, the Big Pine Friends of the Library were proud of the Library’s historic nature, and contributed much positive energy into repairing and improving it. Many library patrons still care intensely about the fate of the Library. In a few years, the players will again change, political opinions will shift, and the focus will be on preserving the historic remnants of Big Pine’s Main Street. Regardless of public opinion within the small town of Big Pine, the County of Inyo has a responsibility to preserve and protect historic resources owned by the County, as well as working with property owners to encourage them to see the value in owning and restoring historic property. The benefit extends beyond the educational to the economic, as tourism ranks as Inyo’s number one business, and heritage tourism is a significant and growing reason that visitors come to Inyo County. The historic Big Pine Library is a part of the pastiche of Inyo County’s heritage, and, with foresight, will continue to enhance the streetscape of Big Pine and inform our understanding of Inyo’s history.

Nancy B. Masters
January 27, 2007

¹² Local History File, Inyo County Free Library